

VZCZCXRO9194

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAK #0285/01 0460910
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 150910Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5236
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH//
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/TSR ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000285

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM PREL OSCE TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: ANKARA CONFERENCE DISCUSSES HOW TO
RESOLVE THE KURDISH ISSUE

REF: 07 ANKARA 2731

1.(SBU) Summary and comment: Over 800 academics, journalists, human rights NGOs, and Kurdish politicians discussed nonviolent solutions to Turkey's Kurdish problem February 9-10 at the Turkish Peace Assembly's Ankara conference, "Democratization and the Kurdish Issue in the New Constitutional Process." Speakers unanimously urged more dialogue, and argued that the new Turkish constitution now being considered should devolve authority to local administrations and recognize cultural "sub-identities" such as Kurdish, Greek, and Armenian. The diversity of speakers expressing previously taboo viewpoints in a fairly open atmosphere was the conference's most striking aspect; similar remarks previously have led to arrests and convictions for "inciting terrorism" or "contravening the indivisibility of the state." While the conference produced constructive proposals, the absence of participants from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and main opposition parties diminished the conference's impact. End summary and comment.

"Kurdish Issue" Conference Draws Large Crowd

12. (SBU) Academics, journalists, NGO representatives and Kurdish politicians gathered in Ankara February 9-10 to discuss how the Kurdish issue might be addressed in the new constitution AKP is drafting. The Turkish Peace Assembly (TPA), a 2007-founded civil society group focused on peacefully solving the Kurdish issue, brought together speakers from across the country to discuss regional administration, cultural rights and identities, women's issues and nonviolence means of dispute settlement. In opening remarks, former Hacetepe University Professor Cengiz Gulec reminded the audience that freedom of expression means the ability to oppose government or majority ideas without being accused of threatening the indivisible unity of the state. His message was underscored, coincidentally, by a 200,000-person strong secularist protest, occurring nearby, of those opposed to lifting the headscarf ban at universities.

Recommendations: Strengthen Local Administrations,
Reduce Militarism, and Redefine Citizenship

13. (SBU) One panel proposed giving additional authority to local administrations to bring the country together instead of fueling separatism. Istanbul University Professor Oktay Uygun told the audience that Turkey's strong central government has failed to solve the Kurdish problem. He suggested following the French system, with the central government retaining essential national functions such as defense and monetary policy and local parliaments exercising control over issues such as culture, education, and health. Uygun emphasized that such a model would not be possible until guns are silenced. Former pro-Kurdish DEP MP Hatip Dicle suggested dividing up Turkey into 20-25 autonomous regions that could wave the national flag and a regional flag.

14. (SBU) Another panel asserted Turkey should respect different cultural identities. Ankara University Professor Baskin Oran, delivering the same argument that led to his trial and conviction of inciting hatred and denigrating "Turkishness" (reftel), maintained that Turkey could not solve its Kurdish problem until it recognizes a territorial-based Turkish "supra-identity" and cultural "sub-identities," such as Kurd, Armenian, and Greek. Abdullah Demirbas, fired as Diyarbakir Sur mayor and being tried for using Kurdish in municipal services, argued it is impossible to run a well-operating government in the Southeast without using Kurdish. Many of his former constituents are now unable to use public services such as health care because they do not understand Turkish.

15. (SBU) Several speakers called for an end to armed conflict. "Vatan" columnist Rusen Cakir said the first step is for the PKK to lay down weapons unconditionally. Cakir warned the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society party (DTP) that it

ANKARA 00000285 002 OF 002

must distance itself from the PKK. If it fails to do so, growing Islamic forces close to AKP and controlled by Turkish Hizbullah and Fethullah Gulen would continue to diminish the Kurds' political power. DTP Mardin MP Emine Ayna responded that the first step to a peaceful environment is for the Turkish military to end its operations. Ayna added the media contributes to instability by portraying the DTP negatively.

16. (SBU) The TPA released a communique following the conference recommending the AKP's new constitution abolish the military's role in politics; strengthen local administrations; protect citizen's basic economic, social, and cultural rights; and redefine Turkish citizenship to prevent discrimination because of ethnic, religious, sexual, or political backgrounds.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

WILSON